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THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

THE SKRYVENERS' PLAY,
THE INCREDULITY OF ST. THOMAS.

FROM A MANUSCRIPT

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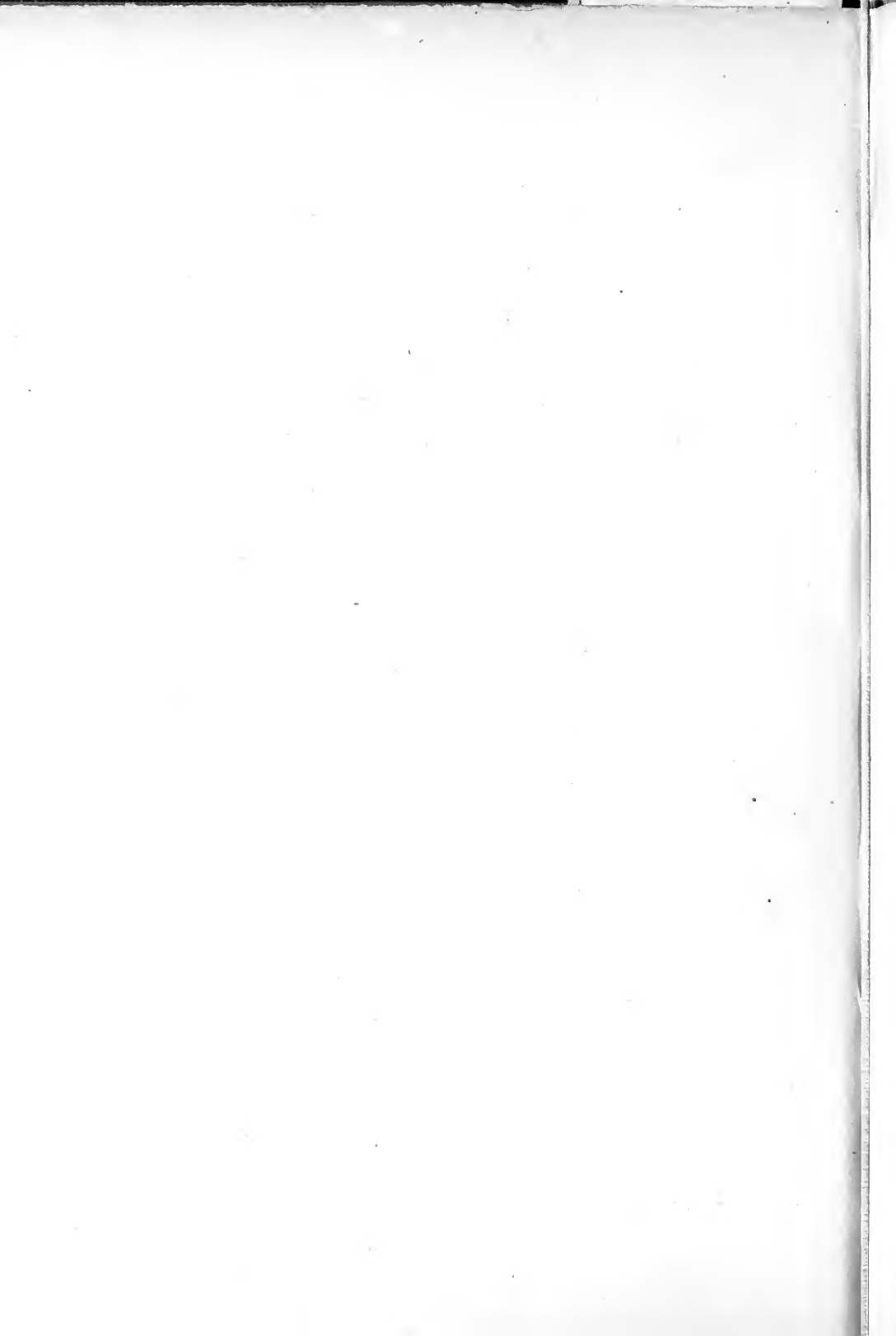
JOHN SYKES, ESQ. M.D. OF DONCASTER.

EDITED BY

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PRINTED FOR THE CAMDEN SOCIETY.

M.DCCC.LIX.



INTRODUCTION.

ALTHOUGH the manuscript from which the ensuing Miracle-play is printed is not, perhaps, earlier than the reign of Henry VI., there is ground for believing, from the character of the speeches, and from the extreme simplicity of its construction, that, if not the oldest, it is one of the oldest dramas existing in our language. In this respect it may rival "The Harrowing of Hell," the MS. of which (Harl. 2253) carries us back to the reign of Edward III.

It is not now printed for the first time. It was discovered many years ago "amongst the Archives at Guildhall, York," and was published by Mr. J. Croft, F.S.A. in his "*Excerpta Antiqua*," which came out in 1797. Ancient records were not then read with so much facility as at present; the manuscript itself is in various places scarcely legible, and the then editor, without being at all to blame, committed serious errors which we have endeavoured to remedy. The valuable original is now the property of John Sykes, Esq. M.D. of Doncaster, who has kindly permitted the Camden Society to make use of it.

Exclusive of the parchment cover, (on which the word

INTRODUCTION.

“Skryveners” was written at a very early date,) it consists of only four leaves, or eight pages, of vellum, not very closely written : the size of the page is $9\frac{1}{2}$ inches long by $6\frac{1}{2}$ inches broad ; and an infusion of galls has been freely used, in the hope of making the writing more obvious, which has sometimes had the contrary effect.

The subject of the play is the Appearance, or rather the successive appearances, of the Saviour, first to the Apostles Peter, James, and John, and afterwards to the same Apostles with the addition of St. Thomas, as recorded in the Gospel of St. John, xx. 19—29. Under the title of the Incredulity of St. Thomas, this is an incident that has been employed in every known series of Miracle-plays ; and there can be no reasonable doubt that that under consideration only formed one of a regular succession of scriptural dramas, or pageants, performed annually by different guilds of the city of York. To the Scriveners’ Company was allotted “The Incredulity of St. Thomas ;” and the manuscript in our hands was doubtless the very prompt-book used by the person, denominated Book-holder, whose duty it was to watch and assist the hesitating performers in the delivery of their parts. When the representations were at an end, these prompt-books were collected together, and deposited in some chest, or other receptacle, in the guildhall, until

they should again be required. Many similar prompt-books, belonging to other plays, must formerly have existed; and, after the lapse of so many centuries, the wonder is that any one of them should have been preserved. As, however, one has come to light, it is by no means impossible that others may still lurk in some dark and unopened archive.*

The collections of such performances which have come down to our time, and which have formerly belonged to Coventry, Chester, Widkirk, and other places, were, in all probability, transcribed from the separate and subsequently accumulated prompt-books. The Shakespeare Society printed those of Coventry and Chester in 1841 and 1843, while the Widkirk series, usually known as the Towneley Manuscript, had already been published by the Surtees Society in 1836.

It will be seen that nothing of a dramatic character can well exceed the constructive simplicity of the York Play here printed. The number of actors required for its representation would only be five, the characters

* Mr. Davies in his "York Records of the Fifteenth Century," 8vo. 1843, p. 233, states that the Plays were 57 in number a few years later than in 1415, and in his list the Scriveners' Play, *Apparicio Christi Thome Apostolo et aliis*, is the fiftieth. The MS. formerly in Thoresby's collection, afterwards at Strawberry Hill, and at its last remove sold among the late Mr. Heywood Bright's books to Lord Ashburnham, has been believed to be a collection of these separate Plays.

being the Saviour, St. Peter, St. John, St. James and St. Thomas. It is this circumstance, combined with the nature of the language put into the mouths of these personages, which induces us to believe that the piece, as it has descended to us, existed in that very shape at least as early as the reign of Edward III. If the reader will refer to the Coventry Play upon the same subject (Edit. Shakesp. Soc. p. 364) it will be seen that it is of a much more complicated and elaborate description; while into the Chester Play (edit. Shakesp. Soc. vol. ii. p. 101) speeches of a comparatively modern cast have been introduced,—a remark that will even more strongly apply to the Widkirk Play (edit. Surtees Soc. p. 280) where St. Paul makes a long harangue against the female sex, which could hardly have belonged to the performance as it was first written and represented. The number of persons required to act it was also considerably larger in all three, than in the ensuing drama, which we are decidedly of opinion is of an earlier date, and has reached us in a state of much greater purity.

It may be right to add, that in a few places we have restored the measure of the original, where it was disregarded by the old scribe, who ran one line into another for the sake of economising space.

J. P. C.

SKRYVENERS.¹

Petrus

Alas, the woo y^t we are wroght!
had neu¹ no men so mekyll thowght.
Sens y^t oure lord to deth was browght
wyth Jewys ffell,
owt of this sted sens durst we nott,
butt heer a dwell.

Johēs

Her haue we dwellyd w^t panys strong,
& wth o^r lyvys owr lothe we lyff so longe,
Sens y^t thes Jewys wroght this wrong
our lord to sloo:²
Sens drust we neu¹ come thayme emong,
ne hyne goo.

Jacob³

yes wekyt Jewys haytes vs full yll,³
and byt¹ panys thay putt vs tyll;
y⁹for I red ⁴ we dwell styll
here y^t wee leynd,
tyll y^t cryst vs some socor send.

Jhċ

Pees and Rest be vnto yow.

Petrus

A, breder dere! whatt may we trow?
 What was y^e syght y^t we saw now,
 shynyng so bryght?
 and thus ys wanysshid, we wayt not how,⁵
 ow[t] off ovr syght?

Johċs

Owt of o^r syght now ys yt sowght;
 yt makes vs mad y^e lyght yt browght:
 what yt may bey?

Jacob₃

Yt ys some vanytes in ovr thought:
 noght els trow I.

Jhċ

Pes vnto yow eũ moor myght bee.
 Dreed yo noght, for I ame hee.

Petrus

One godes name, benedicitie!
 what may this meyne?

Jacob₃

A sprett for sothe, so thynke me,
 y^t doos vs teyne.⁶

Johčs

A sprett yt ys, y^t trow I Reght,
 y^t yus Apeyryd here to o^r syght.
 yt makes hus mad of mayne and myght,
 so yt vs ffrayd.
 yt ys y^e same y^t broght y^e lyght,⁷
 that vs affrayd.

Jhč

What thynke ye, made men,⁸ in yo^r thought?
 what mornyng In yo^r hartes ys wroght?
 ffor I ame cryst, ne dred you noght:
 here may yow see
 y^e same body y^t hays yow bowght
 vppon a tree.

y^t I ame come yow here to meytt,
 be hold and se my handes, my feett,
 and grathly grapis my wondes weytt⁹
 all that here ys.
 yus was I dyght yo^r balis to beyt,
 and bryn to blys.

for yow yer gattes yus haue I goon.¹⁰
 ffelys me grathly euy ylke one,
 and se-y I haue ffleche & bone:
 grapis me now,
 ffor so ne hays sprettes none;
 y^t shall ye trow.

to gayr yow kene,¹¹ and knaw me clere,
 I shall yow schew insampylles sere:
 bryng now forth vnto me here
 some of yo^r meyt,
 yf yow emonges yow all In fere
 haue owght too eytt.

Jacob3

y^u louand lord, y^t last shall aye,¹²
 loo here ys meyt, yf y^u eytt may,
 A hony come, y^e soth to say,
 Rochfych yrtill:
 to eyt y^o of we wold ye pray
 wyth full good will.

Jhċ

Now, sens ye haue broght me y^s meyt,
 to make yo^r trowght stedfast & grett,
 & for ye shall whan hope forgett,¹³
 & trow In me,
 w^t yow now here yen will I eyt;
 y^t ye shall see.
 now haue I doon, ye haue seen how,
 bodely here etyn wyth yow.
 Now stedfastly luke y^t ye trow
 yett in me efte;¹⁴
 & takes y^e remland vnto you
 y^t here his left.
 For yow thus was I rent & rayst:
 y^o for some of my panys ye tayst,
 and speke nore whar yo^r wordes I wayst
 here that ye lere;
 & vnto you y^e holy goost
 resave you here.¹⁵
 bes now trow, and trowys In me;
 and here I grant in your postey,
 whom y^t ye bound bondon shalbe
 Ryght at your steyne,¹⁶
 and whom y^t ye lowys lowsyd shalbe
 euer moor In hevyn.

Thomas

Alas, for sythe and sorow sad !
 Mornyng makes me masyd & mad;
 on grownd now may I goo vnglad,
 both eyn and morne:
 y^t hynd y^t I my helpe of had
 his lyff hays lorne.

lorne I haue y^t luffly lyght
 y^t was my master moost of myght,
 so dulfully as he was dyght
 was neuⁿ no man:
 such wo was wroght of y^t worthy wyght
 w^t wondis wan.¹⁷

wan was his wondis, & wonderus weytt,
 wth swapis sore¹⁸ was he swong y^t swett,
 all nakytt nalyd throwgh handes & feytt,
 Alas, for pyne !
 y^t blyst y^t best my balles myght beyt
 his lyf shuld tyne.

Alas ! for sorow my selfe I schened,¹⁹
 when I thynke hertely of that hend:
 I fand hym ay a faythfull frend
 trewly to tell.

vnto my bredre now wyll I wynd,
 wher some y^{ai} dwell.

So wofull wyghtis was neuⁿ none;
 ovr Joye, ovr comforth is all goon:
 of mornyng may we make o^r mone
 In ylk a land.

God blise you, bredre, blod and bone,
 same ther ye stand.

Petrus

Welcom, thomas, wher hais y^u bene?
for wyt y^u well, wth owttyn wene,
Jhū our lord yen haue wee seen
one grownd here gane.

Thomas

What say ye, man? alas! for teyn
I trow ye mang.²⁰

Johēs

Thomas, trewly yt ys not to layne;
Jhū our lord is resyng agane.

Thomas

Do way: yo^r talis is but a trayne
of ffullis vn wyse;
For he y^t was so ffully slayne
how suld he Rysse?

Jacob³

Thomas, lely he ys one lyff²¹
y^t tholyd y^e Jewys his fleche to Ryfe.
he lett vs feyle his wondes fyve,
y^t lord veray.

Thomas

that trow I nott, so moth I thryfe:
why sa ye say?²²

Petrus

Thomas, we saw his wondes weyt,
 how he was nalyd throwght handes & feyt.
 hony and fych w^t vs he eytt,
 y^t body fre.

Thomas

I lay my lyf, yt was some sprett
 ye wend was hee.²³

Johēs

Nay, thomas, y^u hais mys goon;
 for why he bad vs eu⁹ylkon
 to grape hym grathly blod and boon,
 and flesch to feell:
 such thynges, thomas, hais spretes noone;
 y^t wytt thou well.²⁴

Thomas

Now, felos, lett be yo^r fare.
 tyll that I see y^t body bare,
 and syne my fyngers put in ther
 wyth in his hyd,
 and feell the wond this sper shere
 Ryght In his syd,
 are shall I trow no talis be twene.²⁵

Jacob,

Thomas, that wond yen haue we seen.

Thomas

Yay; ye wott neu⁹ whatt ye meyne:
 your wyttis ye wants.
 thynke no syne thus me to teyn,*
 and tyll wyth trawntes?²⁶

Jh̃c

Peys and Rest be vnto you:
 and, thomas, tente to me take y^u
 put forthe thy fyngers to me now:
 My handis y^u see,
 how I was nalyd for mans prow²⁷
 A pone a tree.

Be hold, my wondis ar all bled hand.²⁸
 here In my syd put in thy hand,
 and ffeell this wond, and onderstand
 that yt ys I;
 And be no morre so mys trowand,²⁹
 but trow trewly.

Thomas

My lord! my god! full well is mee.
 A, blod of pryse! blyst myght thou be:
 Man kynd in erth, be hold and sec
 this blissed blod.
 Marcy, lord, now haske I the
 w^t mane and mood.³⁰

* This line seems to have been altered thus, chiefly by a marginal addition:
 "Ye must thynke syne thus me to teyn."

Jh^h

Thomas, for thow hais seyne this syght,
y^t I am Resyng as I the hyght,
therfor trowys y^t euerylk wyght,
 blist be they e^u,
That trowys holy In my Rysyng ryght,
 and saw yt neuer.

My bredern frindes, now forth In fere,
Ouer all in ylk a countrie sere:
My Rysyng both fare and nere
 preached shall be,
And my blissyng I gyve you her,
 And this meny^e.³²

NOTES.

¹ Skryveners.] This word is written in a handwriting of the time upon the ancient parchment cover to the MS., indicating that the Play was acted by the Guild of Scriveners, we may presume, of the City of York.

² our lord to sloo] *i. e.* our Lord to slay. Here and elsewhere we observe the capital or other letters as we find them in the original, in order to give a more exact notion of it, and of the practice of the age.

³ haytes vs full yle] So the original, but Mr. Croft misread "haytes" *hath*: the meaning of the line is, "These wicked Jews hate us full ill."

⁴ Y² for I red] *Therefore I advise.* In the next line "here y^t wee leynd" means *here that we lie* or remain: James advises the disciples not to remove, until Christ send them some succour. After these words we are to suppose that the Saviour either entered, or made himself visible, to the disciples with the words "Peace and rest be unto you."

⁵ we wayt not how] We wit, or *know*, not how.

⁶ y^t doos vs teyne] To *teen* or *tene* is a verb, but not so commonly used as the substantive, which has various senses: here "*teyne*" means *annoy*, *grieve*, or *vex*—"that does us *annoy*." It occurs afterwards in the form of "tyne."

⁷ y^t ys y^e same y^t broght y^e lyght] See what John says before to the same purport. It is clear, therefore, that on the appearance of the Saviour some contrivance was used for producing instantaneous splendour.

⁸ what thynke ye, made men] *i. e.* *mad* men. Croft read *mey* for "men;" and in the next line *harth* for "*hartes*."

⁹ and grathly grapis my wondes weytt] *i. e.* and *readily gripe*, or feel, my *wet* wounds. *Grath* is an adjective of ordinary occurrence, but the adverb is more uncommon, and Richardson in his Dictionary has no example of its use.

¹⁰ for yow ye; gattes yus haue I goon] "For you these *ways* thus have I gone." The Saviour again requires them to use the evidence of their own senses, and to ascertain that he was composed of flesh and bone, which spirits have not.

¹¹ to gayr yow kene] *i. e.* "to *make you know*." The word "gayr" seems to have been originally miswritten *graz*, and it is corrected in the MS. by interlineation.

¹² y^a louand lord, y^t last shall aye] *i. e.* "Thou *loving* lord, that shall endure for ever." "Lovand" is the A.S. participle present, as *leapand*, *feeland*, *bleedand*, &c. Croft very absurdly printed "*Then honor'd* lord," &c. The MS. is here very plainly written. The disciples afterwards offer the Saviour honey-comb and roach-fish.

¹³ & for ye shall whan hope forgett] "Wanhope," usually spelt as one word, though

not so in this MS., is *despair*. Christ eats in order to render the confidence of the disciples firm and great, and for the purpose of banishing their despondency.

¹⁴ yett in me efte] i. e. yet in me *hereafter*. The Saviour then bestows the remnant, or what is left, on the disciples present.

¹⁵ & vnto you ye holy goost
resave you here] "Goost" (probably formerly written *gayst*) seems intended to rhyme with "rayst" and "wayst" in previous lines; but the MS. is far from clear in this part of the play, and perhaps was not understood by the scribe. The general import is evident enough.

¹⁶ Ryght at your steyne] "Right at your *voice*." It was most likely properly written *stevyn* by the author, but mistaken by the scribe: it, of course, rhymes with "hevyn" in the next line but one.

¹⁷ w^t wondis wan] We must take "wan" here in the sense of *faint*, or *languid*, the epithet being applied to the wound, instead of the sufferer.

¹⁸ wth swapis sore] With sore *blows* or *strokes*. There is, perhaps, some corruption in the two following lines. A "swape" is still a *whip* in the North of England.

¹⁹ my selfe I schened] To "shend," among other things, means to *destroy*. Thomas says that he mars, undoes, or destroys himself with grief on account of the loss of the Saviour, whom he had always found a faithful friend.

²⁰ I trow ye mang] Perhaps "mang" is to be considered the provincial pronunciation of *meng*, and then the meaning would be "I trow ye *are confused*." To *meng* is to mingle, and it is so used in the Towneley Miracle-Plays, as printed by the Surtees Society, *gvo*. 1836, p. 35.

²¹ he ys one lyff] He is *alive*. Croft printed, "Thomas lely is our lyff," which is nonsense. In the next line he converted "Ryfe" into *ryse*, by mistaking the *f* for an *s*; and in the corresponding line he converted "thryfe" into *thrye*. "Tholyd," in the next line, means *suffered*.

²² why sa ye say] Either this is an observation "why, so ye say," or the words have been inverted for the sake of the rhyme, and we ought to read it as a question "why say ye so?"

²³ ye wend was hee] i. e. "I lay my life it was some *spirit* that you *supposed* was he." Jacobus has already used the word *sprit*.

²⁴ y^t whytt thou well] The meaning is, "Spirits never have such things, Thomas, that you well *know*."

²⁵ are shall I trow no talis be twene] "Ere I shall be sure there are no tales between us." The word "fare," in the first line of this stanza, is used in the same way by Chaucer, as quoted by Richardson: "Now, fellows, let be your fare," is, "Now, fellows, put an end to this *ado*."

²⁶ and tyll wyth trawntes] The meaning seems to be, "Do you think it no sin to grieve me thus, and to put upon me such *inventions*?" There is, possibly, some clerical error in "tyll."

²⁷ for mans prow] i. e. for man's *benefit* or *advantage*. Chaucer uses "prow" in

this sense: see Tyrwhitt's Glossary; also the Towneley Miracle-Plays, as published by the Surtees Society, p. 11.

²⁸ ar all bled hand] So written in the MS., but properly it ought to be *bleedand*, for bleeding: see note 12 on the word "lovand." Croft read "my wondis are all *bledsand*."

²⁹ mys trowand] i. e. *misbelieving*, or *unbelieving*.

³⁰ w^t mane and mood] Equivalent to "with might and main;" or more properly "main and might," "mood" rhyming with "blod."

³¹ And this menye] Referring, of course, to the spectators of the play, assembled round the scaffold, on which the representation took place.

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